



## Bringing the UNCCD down to earth

Practical lessons learned in the context of German development cooperation in Central America and the Caribbean



CCD Project  
Convention Project to  
Combat Desertification



On behalf of  
Federal Ministry  
for Economic Cooperation  
and Development

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH was formed on 1 January 2011. It brings together the long-standing expertise of DED, GTZ and InWEnt. For further information, go to [www.giz.de](http://www.giz.de)

Published by

Deutsche Gesellschaft für  
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH  
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Photography ©: Sylvia von dem Busche (cover, pages 5, 9, 10, 15, 23, 25, 29, 30, 33, 38, 40),  
GIZ/Klemens Riha (page 13), GIZ/Anselm Duchrow (page 17), Cosme Bido (page 21),  
GIZ (page 28), Kenneth Rivera (page 35)

Design: MediaCompany – Agentur für Kommunikation GmbH, Bonn Office

Printed in the EU on Envirotop, a 100 % recycling paper

Bonn, January 2011

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## Preface

Sustainable land use is an important means of coping with global challenges such as poverty reduction, food security and climate change mitigation. With the 1996 adoption of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the international community committed itself to the sustainable use of natural resources – soil, water and vegetation – in the world's arid areas. The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is providing support for the Convention's implementation through a variety of measures, thereby fulfilling its responsibility to assist the endeavours of countries affected by desertification.

What, however, lies behind the abstract concept 'implementation of the UNCCD' and what is the added value of an international set of regulations for local and national players? How can national strategic processes be intertwined with concrete local measures for sustainable land use and the fight against desertification? How can best practices and lessons learned be applied across national borders? These are the questions this publication answers. To that end, it has drawn on the longstanding experience of the project to combat desertification in the Caribbean and in Central America, a cooperative programme carried out by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH and the German Development Service (DED) – now working together as Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of BMZ.

Most people, when they think of Central America and the Caribbean, probably envision luxurious vegetation and idyllic beaches. Yet, more than one quarter of the region's people live in arid zones, where the degradation of natural resources leads to falling agricultural output, land disputes and deeper poverty. Today, only 2 % of Haiti's land is covered with forests, and 37 million tonnes of valuable topsoil is lost every year.

Specifically, this publication is a collection of the most useful lessons learned in the process of the six-year programme, working hand-in-hand with local partners. It seeks to highlight the elements that helped to advance these collaborative projects in Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Honduras, and to present the results in a practical, standardised format. In the broadest sense, then, this publication is an illustration of how German development cooperation works with partners to make the Rio Conventions – in particular the UNCCD – more effective on the ground. Our partners played decisive roles in the design, implementation and outcome of these projects.

A policy guide rather than a technical handbook, this publication spans a range of activities in sustainable land management, from the design and planning of effective national-level programmes through the principles of fundraising and media campaigns to municipal-level environmental auditing and rainwater harvesting.

We hope this publication will be useful both for decision makers in developing countries and for practitioners involved in sustainable land management.



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# 1. Introduction

Although Central America and the Caribbean is a region known for its tropical forests, over a quarter of the land is affected by desertification. The affected areas may appear small on the map, but they account for a relatively large proportion of each country, and the extent of land degradation is significant. A look at the loss of forest cover, as a specific indicator of desertification, reveals that the Dominican Republic has registered a reduction

of almost 60% over the past 100 years, with the biggest losses recorded over the last four decades (around 45%). In Haiti, the nation that occupies the other part of the island, forest cover is just 2%, while Honduras has lost around 3.5 million hectares of forest cover.

Between 2003 and 2009 the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH (German technical cooperation), in close cooperation with the Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst (DED) (German Development Service), supported selected countries in Central America and the Caribbean in implementing the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The aim of the Regional Project to combat desertification was to develop and implement solutions to break the vicious circle of poverty and environmental deterioration in regions affected by land degradation.





In Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Honduras, the Regional Project directly supported government and civil society actors committed to implementing the Convention. German Development Cooperation provided technical assistance and organisational support to set up the National Coordinating Bodies, develop the National Action Programmes (NAPs) through participatory processes, carry out specific activities to combat desertification and mobilise resources to finance them.

A dynamic exchange of experiences and knowledge was begun with other countries in the region, resulting in the development of regional and international initiatives in the context of the Convention.

The wrap-up of a development cooperation project provides an opportunity to draw conclusions and determine what lessons are worth passing on to UNCCD actors facing similar situations.

The purpose of this brochure is to summarise the lessons learned in the project's main areas of intervention, with a view to contributing to dialogue on good practice for the implementation of the Convention and other environmental governance processes. They are presented as short, practical messages to facilitate communication. We have also endeavoured to provide candid reflections, because we believe that we can learn from bad as well as good experiences.

The lessons were identified and discussed with those involved in the project in the region, and we hope that we have accurately captured the key messages.

It is also important to note that German development cooperation contributed in only a small way to the achievements presented and analysed here. The credit must go to all the governmental and non-governmental actors who partici-

pated in efforts to combat desertification, particularly governmental and civil society focal points. Many bilateral and multilateral organisations, in addition to German development cooperation, contributed to the achievements. They include the UNCCD Global Mechanism and Secretariat, with which we worked in close coordination at all times, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), through projects funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Oxfam and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).





Natural resources in Haiti are in an alarming state. Plateau Central, Haiti, 2005

### As the crisis grows, a growing global response

The predicted devastation of agricultural land from climate change, the claims on land from agro-fuel production, rising food prices and the growing food needs of a global population projected at 9 billion by 2050 could spell disaster for many developing countries. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 120 million additional hectares of cultivable land, primarily in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, are required just to meet expected food demand over the next four decades. How is this to be achieved? Land degradation due to human activities continues to spread at a rate of 1 per cent per year.

Despite its disappointments, the Copenhagen climate summit in December 2009 showed that the international community has started to face up to the need for urgent action. Among the necessary steps is measures to ensure greater synergy between the principal global environmental conventions, in particular the UNCCD, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD), to start addressing land, climate, biodiversity and food issues in a more effective and coordinated manner.

In particular, Sustainable Land Management (SLM) is increasingly recognized as a common denominator of most environmental and development goals and is becoming a vital component of programmes to meet the global challenges. If undertaken rapidly and effectively, action to recover degraded land and manage it sustainably under the UNCCD process could meet part of the increased demand for cultivable land and help meet the world's environmental, food security and development targets.

## 2. Promoting regional and sub-regional cooperation

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### *1. What is it?*

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Strengthening regional cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean was one of the strategic components of the project concept. Within the framework of the Convention a number of mechanisms have been created to facilitate such cooperation and coordination. At the strategic level, the Parties are invited to develop Regional and Sub-regional Action Programmes. The project objective is not to strengthen these formal mechanisms for regional cooperation; instead, a flexible regional approach has been applied aimed at national and local demands and priorities. The goal has been to exchange experience within a region with very similar problems and conditions when it comes to the degradation of natural resources in arid areas.

Better regional coordination and cooperation are expected to achieve improvements in many areas, including greater ability to:

- carry out actions requiring a regional or sub-regional approach, such as basin management involving various countries;
- support countries that lack technical expertise or financial and human resources, in the name of greater solidarity among countries;
- speed up the dissemination of innovations through mechanisms for exchanges and technology transfer;
- reduce the costs of certain activities that can be undertaken by a group of countries, such as training for technical personnel;
- facilitate coordinated position-taking on issues negotiated in the framework of multilateral conventions;
- contribute to regional integration in general.

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## 2. Achievements

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It is worth noting that the exchanges were not limited solely to the pilot countries, namely Honduras, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, but included several other countries in the region. Exchanges were particularly important with Cuba, which for a long time was considered to be a leader in UNCCD implementation in the region. While priority was given to implementing the project according to national priorities and needs, regional cooperation provided added value by solving trans-boundary issues, enhancing the learning cycle and improving knowledge management among stakeholders. At the same time, promoting regional cooperation can generate high transaction costs. Therefore, wherever appropriate, exchanges and cooperation among the countries in the region were promoted in the simplest and most objective way possible. The following examples of regional cooperation illustrate the achievements and the added value of regional cooperation.

- **Training:** Wherever feasible, training activities were carried out with the participation of more than one country. This allowed for reduced costs and, at the same time, promoted exchange of experience and knowledge.
- **Sub-regional position-taking:** Events held to facilitate dialogue and reflection on issues of interest to the region concerning the Convention allowed for sub-regional position-taking. For example, a sub-regional dialogue held with the support of the European Union led to concrete proposals for the successful implementation in the sub-region of the Convention's ten-year strategy. This way, countries were able to establish dialogue with donors and other Parties to the Convention that have the potential to mobilise funding and build partnership agreements.

Regional exchange with representatives of Guatemala, Honduras, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 2008



- **Thematic exchanges:** Exchanges took place on the basis of specific requests and needs of the Parties. For example, the participation of Cuban representatives in the processes undertaken to develop NAPs was of great value to other countries, as they were able to draw on Cuba's extensive experience and leadership in this area. Delegations from different countries visited Honduras to learn about good practices in the operation and management of the *Grupos Técnicos Interinstitucionales* (interinstitutional technical groups – GTIs) and rainwater harvesting practices.
- **Joint projects:** In the specific context of exchanges on rainwater harvesting, a cooperation project was formulated involving seven countries in the sub-region. The initiative was successful in disseminating this relevant technology, enhancing visibility and mobilising resources and politi-

cal support. The initiative would not have achieved all this without the sub-regional impetus.

- **Cross-border cooperation:** In the particular case of the Dominican Republic and Haiti, the border area was the starting point for the national processes carried out in each country. This is the area most seriously affected by land degradation on the island. It also has the worst poverty rates and is a strategically important issue in the economic and social development of both countries. The cross-border platform for the fight against desertification, known as PAN-FRO, plays an important role that extends beyond environmental issues. Within the strong, non-partisan framework of PAN-FRO, the authorities of the two countries are likely to be able to continue the dialogue established between them even when diplomatic relations are strained.

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### 3. Lessons learned

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The Convention is an international treaty providing a strategic framework for sustainable land management and serves as an important platform for cooperation through its governance structure. Within existing financial and human resource limits, national issues are always accorded priority. Consequently, commitment to and support for regional initiatives often lack continuity, despite the persistent call for more regional cooperation during international conferences. The main lessons to be learned from the project are set out below.

- **National relevance:** Regional cooperation is more likely to be successful when the Parties expect to reap specific benefits for their national processes. This factor leads to very specific requirements. For example, actors involved in the GTI in the Dominican Republic organised a visit to Honduras to learn from its successful efforts to strengthen the institutional development of its own national GTI. Cuba

was also asked to provide support for the development of the NAP. More success was also often achieved by exchanges on technical, rather than political issues, such as rainwater harvesting, environmental education and environmental monitoring, because there was a specific interest and a concrete end-product.

- **Identify the common denominator:** Regional and sub-regional initiatives therefore require a well-defined common denominator of interest to all the parties. In cross-border cooperation, such as the Haiti-Dominican Republic initiative, the interest in cooperation arises from an immediate need to ensure the joint management of natural resources. Beyond cross-border cooperation, common denominators might include joining forces in international negotiations, facilitating technology transfer or harmonising economic incentives for sustainable land management in a way that

Regional Meeting on the  
10-Year Strategy of the UNCCD,  
Santo Domingo, 2008



promotes regional integration. While there are many possible reasons for regional cooperation, it is important to agree on those priorities that are important for every country.

- **Regional cooperation requires strong leadership by some countries.** Traditionally, regional bodies, such as the *Comisión Centroamericana de Ambiente y Desarrollo* (Central American Commission for Environment and Development – CCAD) are expected to take the lead and act as the main facilitators in regional initiatives. These bodies have an important role to play, but experience shows that initiatives have only a limited impact if they are not led by some of the countries and social actors who demonstrate a clear desire to cooperate, share experiences and develop joint solutions. In the context of the UNCCD particularly, where cooperation mechanisms are still being developed, a coalition of the willing is often more effective than processes agreed among all the parties represented on intergovern-

mental bodies. An initiative that serves as an example of this lesson is the introduction of the strategic environmental assessment (SEA) method promoted by the CCAD to improve the environmental sustainability of public policy and investments. As discussed in section 8, the leadership role played by national actors was at the root of the success of the initiative in Honduras and the regional interest that it stimulated.

- **Civil society participation:** Civil society participation adds specificity, legitimacy and dynamism to the cooperation process. Intergovernmental processes, by definition, must adhere to the diplomatic and formal procedures established. The public and organised civil society have different ways of approaching and implementing cooperation. They exchange information and cooperate on the basis of common interests and often choose the most effective and economical ways to do so. Furthermore, civil society participation legitimises regional initiatives in the sense that it demonstrates real popular interest in them. Civil society can also act as a pressure group and kick-start regional initiatives. An example of this is the regional dissemination of rainwater harvesting techniques. Although government support was essential, the initiative and its implementation were promoted through civil society networks.

### 3. Developing a politically relevant National Action Programme to combat desertification

#### *1. What it involves*

The key instrument developed to implement the UNCCD at the national level is the National Action Programme (NAP, see Article 10 of the UNCCD). The NAP provides an analysis of the state of desertification and its underlying causes. Conceived as a living document subject to regular revision, it identifies policies, action to be taken at various levels and needs for strengthening institutional frameworks in order to combat desertification. It specifies the roles assigned to the various actors involved, which include the donor community, the different tiers of government, civil society and the communities con-

cerned. By pointing out the economic relevance of preserving and restoring the productivity of natural resources, it should foster resource mobilisation and enhanced investment in sustainable natural resource management.

The UNCCD invites countries to create an enabling environment, in accordance with conditions within their borders, by strengthening existing legislation on the subject or by establishing new laws and policies and programmes (Article 4 of the Convention).

In order to combat desertification, the Convention places special emphasis on the concept of participation, which also applies to the NAP development process, promoting bottom-up approaches and seeking to involve social groups that are normally excluded from political decision-making. It highlights the fact that it is the local population affected by desertification processes that is knowledgeable about the most suitable practices and that, in many cases, uses and depends on the natural resources in question.

The Convention also stresses that NAPs must be developed using cross-sectoral or intersectoral approaches; desertification cannot be addressed as an isolated issue. The NAP must be linked to and mainstreamed into other sustainable development policies and sectoral policies.

Lastly, the NAP is conceived as a continuous process to promote dialogue and the search for effective solutions. The actors must therefore engage in a continuous participatory process to together review and update the NAP in the light of changing socioeconomic and environmental circumstances



Participative planning in the frame of NAP preparation, Haiti, 2005

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## 2. Achievements

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Honduras was the first country to develop its NAP with the support of the Regional Project. The NAP was finalised in 2004 and updated in 2006. Thanks to the strong commitment of the Honduran focal point and the Ministry for Natural Resources and the Environment (SERNA), an extensive participatory process based on decentralised consultations was carried out to define the NAP's strategic directions in the 76 municipalities in the south of the country affected by drought and desertification. Over the following years, in spite of changes of government, the NAP guided efforts undertaken by SERNA to combat desertification. Activities proposed in the NAP were also funded under the Poverty Reduction Strategy and large-scale rural development programmes.

In the Dominican Republic and Haiti, the first step was the implementation of a decentralised process in the border area, the region most seriously affected by land degradation. Investment in sustainable natural resource management and socio-economic development was urgently needed in the area. It was also necessary to coordinate the numerous initiatives imple-

mented there. In 2003, before the project had got under way, a platform was created to define the strategic lines of action to be taken in the area, involving dialogue among the actors concerned in both countries. The resulting transborder action programme was known as PAN-FRO. These processes led to the formulation of NAPs in 2007 in the Dominican Republic and in 2008 in Haiti.

In the Dominican Republic and in Honduras, the NAPs have become a priority component of their national environmental policy. The GTIs (see section 4) have successfully used the NAPs to influence policies and public investment in areas affected by desertification. Projects such as rainwater harvesting, watershed management, reforestation, the introduction of sustainable farming practices and fuel-efficient stoves that have been tested and approved as good practices are now being funded and scaled up under sectoral programmes.

In Haiti, the NAP was officially launched in September 2009 and it is still too early to evaluate its success.

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## 3. Lessons learned

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**Adapting to conditions in the country.** Though one of the Parties' obligations under the Convention, the NAP must primarily serve the country and, in particular, the population affected by desertification. The specific conditions in each country must be taken into account when addressing questions relating to NAP requirements, the preparation process and follow-up, including the causes of land degradation and, in particular, opportunities to bring about changes. In the Dominican Republic and Haiti, the opportunity arose in connection with the two-nation process launched to develop the border area. In Honduras, the NAP resulted from a critical mass of governmental and non-governmental forces committed to

finding more environmentally sustainable development and poverty reduction models. It is important for actors not to be solely motivated by a desire to meet their obligations under the Convention. The motivation must be to solve real problems facing the country.

**Mainstreaming desertification issues into existing development and sectoral policies.** Many development and sectoral policies have a bearing on sustainable land management issues. Agricultural policy instruments, for example, influence which crops are produced in which regions and what production systems are used. Many resources go into credit programmes, agricultural extension and infrastructure, for

example. Water management, forest management, mining and other types of programmes also have an impact on how land is used. The main challenge is to adapt these policies to make them more compatible with sustainable land management goals.

The NAP should be mainstreamed into existing policies and programmes, so that it does not compete with them for the same resources and political space. In other words, it does not aspire to define new sectoral programmes and policies, but rather to identify opportunities for adapting them to bring them into line with the desertification control strategy. In order to explore ways of adapting the programmes and policies, it is crucial to first have evidence of the impact that the respective sectors have on the land. Specific studies are indispensable, including research into the cost of land degradation, before engaging in dialogue with the different sectors.

**The NAP can only be effective if it has a strong national support base.** During the NAP development process, it is important to mobilise partnerships with a strong commitment to combating desertification. Convincing arguments are not enough to persuade decision-makers. It is necessary to have opinion-makers and other stakeholders, such as influential civil society groups (like the water boards in Honduras), mayors and sectoral departments, carry out advocacy activities to defend the cause in their own interest.

**A 'bottom-up' approach requires appropriate resources and methods.** Participatory policy mechanisms in the region are still in their infancy. Local consultations and other participatory events must therefore be very effectively managed. Otherwise, these events do no more than churn out long lists of demands without any strategic focus. They also risk generating expectations that cannot be fulfilled. For the participatory process to be effective, there must be a two-way dialogue between the national and the local level to analyse the problem of land degradation and possible strategic solutions. Events held with the sole objective of raising demands

or validating the NAP fail to create ownership. In those pilot countries where the process was implemented successfully, the two-way consultation process ensured that the NAP benefited from the required level of knowledge and acceptance by the local and regional authorities and the members of the communities involved. They were committed to implement the decisions because they felt involved and identified with the content of the NAP.

For the process to be feasible, it is also necessary to choose the right decentralised level for establishing a dialogue. It may be the association of municipalities, the municipality itself, the hydrographic basin authority or other similar bodies.

The entire process must be carefully prepared and validated by the National Coordinating Body, taking into account available resources. In the pilot countries, it proved useful to establish partnerships with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) specialised in participatory methods, which provided guidance on implementing the process.

**Effective implementation and follow-up of the NAP requires clear objectives, goals and indicators defined by mutual agreement.** The NAP is a strategic document, so one very important element is its objectives, goals and indicators (the logframe). If these elements are not properly developed, the focal point and other actors will encounter difficulties in their work to manage and promote the NAP. It will be difficult to mobilise resources, measure impacts, monitor implementation and communicate achievements to decision-makers. In the NAP development process, it is important to allow enough time to 'negotiate' the logframe among the actors. It is also important to note that the logframe can only be properly developed if the focus of the NAP has been clearly defined and is shared by the different stakeholders. The pilot countries did not manage to define the logframe for all the areas of intervention of the NAP. Given that the NAP is supposed to be a living document, this is a shortcoming that can nevertheless be remedied during subsequent updates.

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#### 4. Challenges

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The main challenge is to ensure that the NAP is a dynamic process. The strategies to combat desertification established in the NAP must be continuously adapted to environmental, socioeconomic and political conditions in the country. The UNCCD ten-year strategy contains international guidelines that provide good advice on how to perfect the logframe and define goals.

Another challenge is to identify and design instruments for action in combating desertification that go beyond the implementation of projects. The use of instruments such as land-use planning, tax incentives to promote sustainable land management, payment for environmental services, etc. is still in the early stages, but is essential to achieving a significant impact.

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#### 5. Further information on the subject

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##### **Discussion Papers (not published) for the Intersessional Intergovernmental Working Group (IIWG) in charge of drafting the Convention's 10-year strategy:**

- Carlos Pinedas, GTZ (2006): Systemisation of the process to formulate the National Action Plan to combat desertification and drought 2005-2021 (NAP)  
This document systemises the process carried out to develop the NAP in Honduras:  
[www.desertifikation.de/uploads/media/Sistematizacion.pdf](http://www.desertifikation.de/uploads/media/Sistematizacion.pdf)
- Klemens Riha, GTZ (2006): Synthesis Latin America and the Caribbean:  
[www.desertifikation.de/uploads/media/07-01-28\\_Synthesis\\_LAC\\_NAP\\_Study.pdf](http://www.desertifikation.de/uploads/media/07-01-28_Synthesis_LAC_NAP_Study.pdf)
- Reinhard Bodemeyer, GTZ (2006): National Action Programmes under UNCCD - Rules and Reality:  
[www.desertifikation.de/uploads/media/07-02-01\\_Technical\\_Paper\\_NAP.pdf](http://www.desertifikation.de/uploads/media/07-02-01_Technical_Paper_NAP.pdf)

##### **The NAPs of the pilot countries are available on the UNCCD website:**

<http://www.unccd.int/actionprogrammes/lac/lac.php>

Awareness raising workshop in the frame of NAP preparation in Honduras, Tegucigalpa, 2005



## 4. Creating National Coordinating Bodies with political influence

### 1. What it involves

The National Coordinating Body is the forum where governmental and non-governmental actors coordinate and harmonise their efforts to combat desertification, including the NAP development process. These bodies are generally formed by representatives of the public sector, such as the sectoral depart-

ments, representatives of provincial and municipal authorities, organised civil society and bilateral and multilateral cooperation organisations. The latter do not normally have voting rights.

### 2. Achievements

In the pilot countries, the National Coordinating Bodies – the GTIs, or *Comité de Pilotage* (steering committee) in Haiti – are formalised by decree. Their main tasks are to elaborate and update the NAPs and to coordinate the interventions of the actors involved. They do not have the power to deliberate on policy, but they can play an important role in debating, monitoring and guiding public policy relating to the sustainable management of natural resources.

The creation of the GTIs in the pilot countries is considered a major achievement of the efforts undertaken in the context of the UNCCD. The GTIs meet regularly, have increased the number of representatives from different sectors, work efficiently and dynamically and have survived changes of government and other political disruptions. Their achievements include the implementation of coordinated awareness and education campaigns on desertification, the formulation and coordination of specific projects, resource mobilisation, the mainstreaming of sustainable land management into sectoral policies and the coordination of projects with bilateral and multilateral resources. GTZ strengthened these bodies by providing guidance in the areas of organisational development, the definition of the roles and functions of the members and the establishment of operating procedures.

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### 3. Lessons learned

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**The formal institutionalisation of the National Coordinating Body is important but not a guarantee of success.**

Formalisation by virtue of a decree and implementing regulations, as in the Dominican Republic, undoubtedly strengthens the coordinating body's mandate and influence. However, this is not enough; the leaders must show strong commitment and appoint competent representatives with the authority to participate in intersectoral dialogue.

**Good management is key to the coordinating body's effectiveness.** However active the members of the coordinating body are, an efficient secretariat or administrative office is required. In the pilot countries, the focal point and his or her team at the Ministry of the Environment provide secretarial services, which include calling and organising meetings, facilitating communication among the members, recording the minutes of meetings, etc. The success of the coordinating body's work largely depends on how efficient these services are. It is important, for example, that members receive all relevant documents and the agenda in good time, so that they can prepare for meetings. To carry out its functions in the long term, the focal point's secretariat requires appropriate human resources (in terms of numbers and qualification) as well as financial resources and premises where the GTI meetings can be held.

A management instrument that has proved very useful in Honduras and the Dominican Republic is the annual work plan, in which the GTI members set objectives, establish activities and define responsibilities. These plans also make it easier to obtain funding from donors and facilitate communication with government decision-makers.

**A common understanding of its terms of reference is key to the coordinating body's success.** In the beginning, the different groups involved in combating desertification often have very different expectations of the coordinating body. For representatives of affected areas and NGOs, it is important to obtain first-hand information on national pro-



Members of the Interinstitutional Technical Group in Honduras at one of its meetings. Tegucigalpa, Honduras, 2007

grammes, funds and other ways of attracting investment to the region. Access to information is a key expectation. The expectations of representatives from other sectors often centre on securing funds and services to implement the NAP. The focal point has an interest in mobilising political forces in favour of the NAP and discussing matters relating to the Convention, while donors seek to establish partnerships for their interventions. It is therefore vitally important to reach a consensus on the terms of reference, priorities and operation of the coordinating body.

**Project implementation is not the main function of the coordinating body.** In many countries, the focal points and coordinating bodies cannot resist the temptation to acquire and implement their own projects. The interest in having projects of their own is understandable, as they make it possible to mobilise a large number of actors. With the implementation of field projects, combating desertification can become more tangible if these projects are carefully selected in order to allow for intersectoral and interdisciplinary learning experiences.

However, these projects often distract from the policy and principal tasks of the coordinating body. They take up a great deal of energy and exclude those who are not participating. A conscious effort must therefore be made to select projects that are best suited for a learning process. Further, from an administrative perspective, it can be advisable to create sub-working groups to address operational matters relating to projects to avoid clogging up coordinating body meetings. However, the ideal situation is to leave project management in the hands of responsible sectoral organisations and focus the work of the GTIs on matters of coordination, advocacy and political dialogue.

**It is important to promote the initiatives of all the actors.** The different actors will gladly present their initiatives and projects when given the opportunity. The GTIs should also take the opportunity, whenever feasible, to present scientific research and discuss political questions with other stakeholders. This way, all actors become aware of the commitment of other institutions, which facilitates cooperation and generates synergies. Membership in the GTI is thus an advantage, because it encourages integration among institutions and because direct contact between people strengthens institutional cooperation.

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#### *4. Challenges*

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The challenge for a national coordinating body is to increase the level of influence in political decision-making and create an interdisciplinary culture at all levels. Many sectoral departments in any given organisation still act individually. It may be necessary to create decision-making bodies at a higher level than the coordinating bodies. These would be formed by the same actors, but with top-level representatives. This can help strengthen the commitment of the sectoral departments to co-ordination efforts. Various models are under discussion in the pilot countries, but none has been established yet.

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#### *5. Further information on the subject*

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**The GTI of the Dominican Republic has a website which provides insight into the work it does:**

[www.medioambiente.gov.do/cms/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=543&Itemid=237](http://www.medioambiente.gov.do/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=543&Itemid=237)

## 5. Resource mobilisation

### *1. What it involves*

The three main dimensions of resource mobilisation for sustainable land management are:

#### **Implementation of the NAP using existing resources:**

An essential part of efforts to mobilise sufficient funds for the projects and programmes required in the affected areas is the harmonisation and rechanneling of existing investment in sectoral programmes and projects to serve the objectives and principles of the NAP. Such activities include the rehabilitation of degraded land, reforestation, erosion control and the introduction of sustainable farming practices. They also include efforts to raise the awareness of the main actors and promote environmental education.

#### **Mobilisation of new resources:**

At the same time, taking into account the findings of the analysis of existing resources, the NAP must also attract new financing for additional needs identified during the planning process. Although there are different approaches to and means of achieving this, the NAP always requires political support and a solid financial strategy, closely linked to other national investment processes.

#### **Sustainability of the management and administration of the National Coordinating Body:**

The focal point and designated administrative office require operational and human resources in order to provide reliable and long-lasting coordination. The budget required is relatively small, although it must be reliable and flexible, so

that the focal point can perform its management functions in an effective and agile manner. Expenses generally include the cost of convening, organising and holding meetings, the cost of administrating and monitoring the coordinating body and the cost of workshops and consultancy to promote and strengthen organisational development.



The Ministers of Environment of Haiti (Yves Andre Wainwright, right) and the Dominican Republic (Max Puig, left) present the initiative PANFRO to the international community during the Conference of the Parties (COP 7) of the UNCCD 2005

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## 2. Achievements

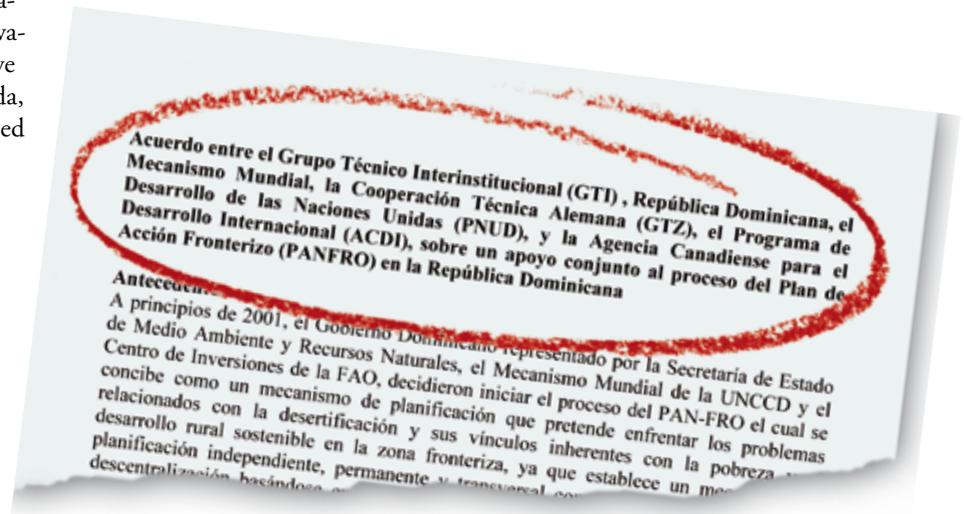
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The pilot countries implemented these three types of resource mobilisation strategy successfully, although in different ways. All of them found that advocacy to promote the NAP and the UNCCD objectives at the highest political level was effective. In Honduras, an executive summary of the NAP was presented to decision-makers, and activities were carried out in all the countries to increase the NAP's visibility. As a result, the NAP was included in the national budget in Honduras and the Dominican Republic. Although this still did not guarantee the provision of operational resources, it was a good basis for requesting human resources, offices and operating budgets. The focal point teams were gradually set up and now include around five professionals in Honduras and the Dominican Republic. In Haiti, where implementation of the NAP has been hampered by civil war and natural disasters, the team has not yet been fully formed.

In their quest for new sources of direct funding, these countries have put a great deal of effort into formulating projects for the GEF. At present, the Dominican Republic and Haiti, in particular, are the beneficiaries of strategic projects to strengthen management capacities for sustainable land management and promote effective watershed management. These two countries have also attracted bilateral investment from Canada, Spain and Germany for the border area, focused on sustainable natural resource management and desertification control. Honduras managed to develop a portfolio of model projects to combat desertification funded by the GEF and a large-scale European Union rural development project. The convergence matrix was found to be a useful instrument for harmonising projects with bilateral and multilateral funding, allocating donor contributions to lines of action established in the NAP or GTI operating plan. Agreements were also

made with various donors, with a view to harmonising and aligning contributions according to the priorities identified by the affected country, in the spirit of the Paris Declaration. In 2008, dialogue was initiated with the European Union on how to harmonise cooperation within the framework of the UNCCD ten-year strategy.

An important achievement in Honduras in relation to mobilising existing national resources allocated to other programmes was the establishment of links with the Poverty Reduction Strategy. At first, this was confined to the funding of isolated micro-projects in GTI priority areas of action. Subsequently, however, the basis for more systematic cooperation was laid when the municipal strategic development plans were reviewed with the participation of SERNA, using SEA (see section 8) methodology. Significant resources were invested in affected areas in the Dominican Republic under the Quisqueya Verde programme.



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### *3. Lessons learned*

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**Clearly defined objectives and priorities are a prerequisite for resource mobilisation.** This would seem to be a simple lesson, but the failure properly to define the focus complicated the search for partnerships and resources in the early stages. The clear definition of objectives and goals enables potential donors, including national and international cooperation organisations and NGOs, to recognise their contributions within the ensemble of efforts undertaken under the NAP. Part of this task is making an inventory of available resources that have not yet been clearly allocated to combat desertification. This also requires a clear definition of the objectives and scope of combating desertification.

**National ownership is needed to secure resources for the operation of the focal point secretariat.** As mentioned above, the success of the National Coordinating Body's activities depends, to a large extent, on the existence of a secretariat or administrative body to ensure effective communication and coordination among the actors involved. The effectiveness of the secretariat is all the more crucial in the case of resource mobilisation, because significant human resources are required to formulate projects and promote partnerships among the members of the GTI for the cofinancing of projects. Mobilisations of national resources, especially human resources, are needed to ensure the continued work of the focal point secretariat. Support from international cooperation organisations can only complement national efforts. This can be done, for example, by including the item as a component of a GEF project.

**Projects are important...**

The value of projects managed by the focal point or the GTI is explained above. If well-managed and well-focused, such activities can bring actors together, promote joint efforts and serve as demonstration projects. The pilot micro-projects were essential to the development of a portfolio of best practices to be replicated in large-scale programmes.

**...but one needs to think further.**

The causes of desertification are largely related to poor land use. However big projects are, they cannot by themselves change unsustainable behaviour and practices. For that to happen, it is also necessary to change the framework in which economic activities are carried out. Incentives must be created to encourage the inclusion of environmental concerns in projects. Developing ideas and tools for incentives is one of the tasks assigned to actors under the UNCCD. This involves, for example, conducting studies on how to increase the monetary value of sustainable practices as the basis for environmental services payment systems. To this end, it is important to establish partnerships not only with donors, but also with research organisations. Resource mobilisation involves much more than just obtaining funds for projects. For example, a partnership with a network of grassroots associations is also a valuable means of promoting the replication of good practice.

**Supporting government leadership to harmonise donor funding.** Projects funded by bilateral and multilateral donors are important, but they often follow the same logic as discussed above for pilot projects. They also pose an additional problem: they are somewhat inflexible instruments that require considerable human resources to carry out the long project development process. In Haiti and the Dominican Republic, it took more than four years for GEF projects to be approved. Over this time, they became focused on specialist areas, putting serious constraints on participation and harmonisation with other investments (including other GEF projects) and alignment with public policies. For all these reasons, the instruments described above, such as the convergence matrix, must be adopted by all the actors who deal with the government on international cooperation matters. The planning department and other relevant departments must adopt these instruments.

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#### *4. Challenges*

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In the UNCCD ten-year strategy, the affected countries undertake to develop ‘integrated investment frameworks for leveraging national, bilateral and multilateral resources with a view to increasing the effectiveness and impact of interventions’ (Outcome 5.1). The achievements described above therefore need to be consolidated and systematically integrated into the national budget. There is little experience in this at the international level. Many government officers in the region have participated in training provided by the Global Mechanism to develop integrated financing strategies. Guatemala and Honduras have already developed integrated strategies, but have not yet put them into practice.

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#### *5. Further information on the subject*

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[www.global-mechanism.org/about-us/strategicprogrammes/eco-fin-instruments/es](http://www.global-mechanism.org/about-us/strategicprogrammes/eco-fin-instruments/es)

## 6. Touching people's hearts – successful communication

### *1. What it involves*

In order to achieve the ambitious objectives established in the Convention, it is necessary to bring about profound changes in attitudes to natural resource management and how we interact with the environment. This includes changes in the personal behaviour of the users of water, land and vegetation resources globally, institutional changes, changes in economic practices and so forth. Creating awareness about what changes are needed and gradually creating new attitudes is a matter of communication and education. Regardless of how clever the rules and instruments created under the Convention are, such profound changes can only be brought about through messages and forms and means of communication that touch people's hearts.

Successful communication is a key requirement at all levels for all the tasks described in the previous sections. The success of efforts to draw society's attention to the problem and the changes needed, carry out political advocacy, facilitate cooperation among the actors involved and implement many other important activities always depends on an ability to convince those involved. It is very important not to confuse communication with the one-way transmission of information. Communication involves engaging in dialogue, reaching a common understanding and sharing ideas and experiences.

Communication strategies aimed at changing attitudes and behaviour must capture the attention of children and young people in particular. These age groups are particularly receptive to change and are tomorrow's natural resource users. They

can also act as multipliers within their families. Take the example of biodiversity: ten years ago very few young people understood the importance of species variety, which is today considered a matter of common sense.



Exchanges between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, 2003

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## 2. Achievements

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For focal points and members of the National Coordinating Bodies, the proper use of communication tools has become a natural and routine task. Key members are trained to facilitate processes with a variety of actors and have a good command of the tools required to moderate and facilitate group work and to practice target group-specific communication.

Examples:

**General public:** In Honduras and the Dominican Republic, focal point institutions have set up well-designed websites that are used for communication with the general public and include information on the topic, announcements of relevant events, downloads of key documents, important links and other items. It has also become common practice to invite and inform the media to cover special events, such as the World Day to Combat Desertification celebrated on 17 June each year, and to ensure that a wide audience is reached.

**Affected populations:** In the Dominican Republic, an initiative was carried out in cooperation with the *Unión de Emisoras Católicas* (association of Catholic radio stations) to raise the awareness of populations affected by desertification in rural areas, where the main source of information is the radio. A considerable number of radio spots were recorded and broadcast and were warmly received by listeners. Similar campaigns were carried out in Honduras on the subject of saving water.

Another campaign that was particularly successful among civil society organisations in the Dominican Republic and Haiti was the local fair to promote good practice and relevant techniques. Activities of this kind contribute to the effective management of knowledge in the region and to promoting the value of local experiences.

**Schools:** Ministry of Education representatives and environmental education officers are among the most active GTI members and have made efforts to incorporate this subject into school curricula. They use the coordinating body to promote cooperation and obtain inputs, with a view to introducing the subject in school curricula. In 2009, dialogue among the GTI members in the Dominican Republic resulted in the launching of an environmental education programme in 13 provinces located in the country's dryland areas. The programme targets school heads, teachers and students.

**International audience:** Another major communication achievement is the staging of international events within the context of the Convention. Good practices for UNCCD implementation in Central America and the Caribbean have become a reference within the UNCCD thanks to the frequent organisation of side events and presentations at regular international conferences and at those organised by professional or regional initiatives.

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## 3. Lessons learned

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**Professionalising communication.** Communication plays such a strategic role in all areas of environmental management that the returns on investment in human resources and campaigns is virtually guaranteed. The members of the coordinating body and the focal point team are normally engineers, sociologists, scientists, activists, etc., but are rarely communication specialists. It is necessary to improve their communica-



tion skills. In addition, it is also advisable to involve or engage the services of communication professionals and people who can provide guidance on communication strategies. It is a common error in communication strategies to set overambitious objectives that cannot realistically be met with available resources.

**Plan according to available resources.** Although it is possible to achieve considerable impact with few resources, communication is not free. But what is more important while planning and designing communication activities is that available resources need to be taken into consideration. Sometimes lack of financial resources can be offset by volunteers from environmental civil society organisations. Planning also needs to clearly define the focus, the target group and the tools to be used.

**Products and forms of media should be adapted to and developed with the target audience.** In order to reach people effectively, products must be adapted to the target audience, and it is easier to develop such products if representatives of the target group are involved. For example, those participating in the radio spots were people from the same UNCCD pilot region in the country and speaking the same language where they were broadcast. Each spot focused on phenomena that commonly affected the area where it was broadcast, and the message was set in the local context.

Decision-makers need clear, focused, concise recommendations. People are seldom willing to wade through lengthy studies or consultancy reports.

**Campaigns need to convey a positive attitude towards sustainable land management.** Campaigns are very powerful communication tools if they are conducted in a professional manner. Experiences in this area have shown that, although desertification does not have symbols with the appeal of biodiversity's whales and pandas, there are images that convey key messages effectively and create a charismatic and poignant vision of the subject. Although desertification is a threat, cam-



Radio broadcasts as a communication tool.  
Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 2008

aigns should promote the productive and cultural potential of arid areas. The support of famous cultural or sports personalities from the region is also a valuable asset.

**Involve recognised representatives in conveying the message.** Arguments can be put across more effectively by people who have real-life experiences to recount.

The development of communication products is a **learning and communication process** in itself. For example, as part of the initiative to broadcast radio spots, a meeting was organised with NGOs concerned with desertification. NGO representatives recounted their experiences in natural resource protection, which developed into a compendium of specific activities carried out to combat desertification. The development of the 'radio spot' product therefore initiated the compilation of experiences in this area and laid the foundation for cooperation among NGOs.

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#### *4. Challenges*

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The aim of communication is to change attitudes. The challenge is to measure the impact of communication and to use the results to fine-tune the communication strategy. There has been little systematic research on the effect that the dissemination of information has on the sustainable management of natural resources and the environment. Who listens to the radio and when? Who buys newspapers and who else reads them? Is there a correlation between visits to the 'funding for NGOs' section of the website and the projects proposed? How many initiatives were developed by people who heard the radio spots? How can the communication strategy be improved?

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#### *5. Further information on the subject*

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**Link for radio spots:**

[www.gtidominicana.com/Audio/mp3.html](http://www.gtidominicana.com/Audio/mp3.html)

**More on the regional and international dialogue concerning the UNCCD ten-year strategy:**

[www.desertifikation.de/uploads/media/La\\_estrategia\\_decenal\\_de\\_la\\_UNCCD\\_2009.pdf](http://www.desertifikation.de/uploads/media/La_estrategia_decenal_de_la_UNCCD_2009.pdf)

## 7. Bringing the UNCCD down to earth: decentralisation and participation

### *1. What it involves*



Local meetings and workshops with the affected population,  
Plateau Central, Haiti, 2005

The UNCCD emphasises the need for participatory procedures and a bottom-up approach to address desertification and land degradation. It puts local communities, often marginalised in the planning of local development projects, on an equal footing with other actors, recognising that development must focus on the human factor if it is to be sustainable. It opens up new prospects and adopts a specific-to-general approach, highlighting the fact that the population must be fully involved in taking decisions on how to address the problem of desertification and the means of overcoming the poverty in which they live.\* Participation goes beyond the organisation of public hearings and arbitrary inclusion of NGOs in meetings. It implies decentralised planning and implementation of action to combat desertification as an integral part of political participation.

However, the Convention leaves open the question of what structures and mechanisms should be developed to achieve this. It invites countries to find the best options themselves, taking into account specific conditions within their borders.

\* see UNCCD Fact Sheet 1,  
[www.unccd.int/publicinfo/factsheets/pdf/Fact\\_Sheets/Fact\\_sheet\\_01eng.pdf](http://www.unccd.int/publicinfo/factsheets/pdf/Fact_Sheets/Fact_sheet_01eng.pdf)

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## 2. Achievements

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In the Dominican Republic, there have been three experiences involving the decentralisation of desertification control efforts. Two of them involve formal structures similar to the GTI, and the third concerns a civil society network called RIOD-RD.

- At local level, *Comisiones de Trabajo Local* (local working commissions – CTLs) were established as institutionalised links with the national coordinating body in the municipalities. They were formed by representatives of key actors involved in community development: grassroots organisations, associations, NGOs, local authorities, decentralised departments and the private sector. As parallel structures to existing networks and forums, these CTLs never worked well. Due to poor active participation of local stakeholders they could not be maintained. More recently, the Dominican Republic took the initiative again with the formation of *Comisiones de Trabajo Provinciales* (provincial working commissions). It remains to be seen how effectively these commissions will be able to contribute to cooperation at the level of the provinces. However, hosted by the provincial departments of the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources, they have more convening powers and more operational capacities than those at municipal level. Today, the Dominican Republic has eleven such commissions operating in eleven provinces. They are currently in the process of training their members. At the national level, an officer was engaged by the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources, where the UNCCD focal point is based.

- RIOD-RD is a network formed by civil society organisations. The network has a representative with the right to vote on the National Coordinating Body. It provides a space for exchanges and cooperation between organisations operating in the provinces according to their needs. In this way, it was very effective in giving civil society organisations a voice at national level and in mobilising participation in sustainable land management at grassroots level.

In Honduras the GTI refrained from establishing its own structures at the local level. The Honduran Association of Municipalities, however, and a number of NGOs with offices in the municipalities, such as the Asociación Hondureña de Juntas Administradoras de Agua (Honduran Association of Water Boards – AHJASA) are actively participating at national level and use their decentralised structures to implement NAP-related activities. In 2004 AHJASA had a membership of 500 water boards in eight departments, representing 380,000 users.

Furthermore, a process began in 2007 to mainstream the NAP objectives into municipal strategic development plans within the framework of the national Poverty Reduction Strategy (see section 8).

In Haiti, where the initial processes progressed in much the same way as in the other pilot countries, the local consultation process carried out to develop the NAP created an initial participatory basis and awareness.



Workshop to build a Local Working Committee in the Dominican Republic, April 2005

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### *3. Lessons learned*

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**Taking advantage of existing networks and mechanisms for dialogue.** The painful, albeit instructive, experience of decentralised municipal bodies in the Dominican Republic (CTLs) showed that the creation of new, parallel structures had little effect. The CTLs were weak because the actors involved lacked a shared vision and interests. The initiatives launched were well-intentioned, but were based on a top-down approach that went against the spirit of the Convention and did not address the real problems of local development cooperation. Today, thanks to efforts to strengthen the GTI and develop an increasing number of projects and initiatives in the region, the provincial commissions have a clearer mandate and more specific coordination tasks, although closer links with GTI activities in the capital are still required.

In general, the lesson to be learned is that parallel structures established to only serve the NAP are unlikely to be sustain-

able. Identifying appropriate existing local organisations and structures and establishing links with relevant and committed actors is more promising in terms of long-lasting and effective solutions.

**Cooperation networks cannot be set up from outside.**

The Dominican Republic network RIOD-RD was created by NGOs who believed that by joining forces they would have more political clout. Internally, they opted for a very open form of operation: four local meetings are held each year at different venues at the invitation of the focal point. They provide feedback on national and international processes carried out in the context of the Convention. Local organisations are presented and cooperation efforts are established (or not) as a result of informal, open discussions. This network is very useful to the national GTI, as it provides liaison between the different tiers of administration.



Market in the border area between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, Pedro Santana, 2005

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#### *4. Challenges*

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In spite of the considerable progress achieved, decentralisation and participation at the local and regional level are still not sufficiently developed. Environmental management structures in the municipalities are weak, and programmes continue to be based on a predominantly sectoral and vertical approach (top-down). The Convention, the focal points and the GTI have little influence on general policy on decentralisation and social capital in their respective countries. The challenge here, too, is to mainstream the issue into promising decentralisation initiatives, such as municipal strategic planning within the framework of the Poverty Reduction Strategy in Honduras. In some cases, the mobilisation of actors to carry out environmental actions can also have positive effects on self-organisation and political participation capacities at the local level.

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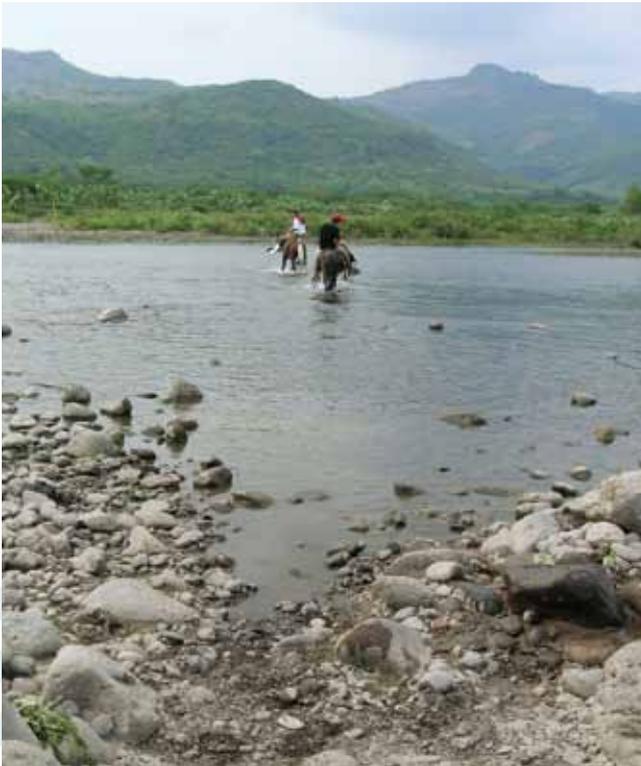
#### *5. Further information on the subject*

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Pedro García Brito: 'La descentralización, la coordinación y la participación social', in  
¿ Un cambio verdadero, o todo como siempre ? La Estrategia Decenal de la UNCCD y su implementación, GTZ, CCD project, 2009, p. 24:

[www.desertifikation.de/uploads/media/La\\_estrategia\\_decenal\\_de\\_la\\_UNCCD\\_2009.pdf](http://www.desertifikation.de/uploads/media/La_estrategia_decenal_de_la_UNCCD_2009.pdf)

## 8. Mainstreaming sustainable land management into municipal development processes – Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)



Rural area in Honduras, 2007

### *1. What it involves*

The municipal level plays a key role in natural resource management. From the legal standpoint, municipalities in the region have many competences to govern and to protect their natural resources, to plan and to enforce land-use systems and to create the adequate administrative structure. In most countries the legal opportunities of decentralisation are not tapped due to economic and social capital limitations. However, since the municipalities are closest to the actual natural resource users, it is of paramount importance to involve the municipal authorities and civil society in combating desertification. By doing this, implementation of the UNCCD and decentralisation processes can become mutually supportive.

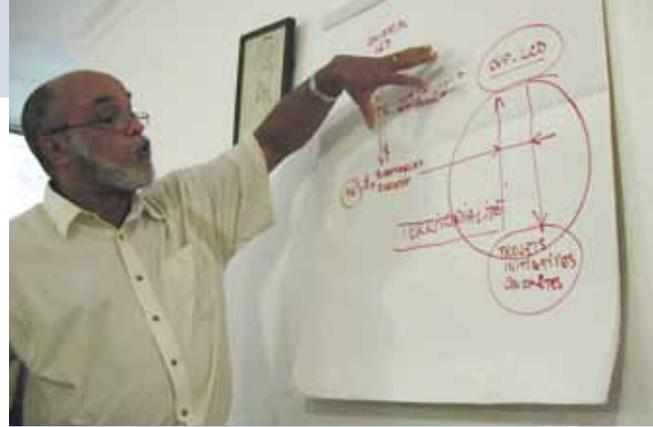
SEA provides an analytical and participatory approach that serves this purpose. It provides instruments for analysis and decision-making which facilitate the incorporation of environmental considerations in policies, plans and programmes. It improves the quality of decision-making, anticipating the repercussions that policies, plans and programmes may have on the environment. It introduces environmental considerations

#### **SEA as defined by the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)**

SEA refers to a range of analytical and participatory approaches that aim to integrate environmental considerations into policies, plans and programmes and evaluate the interlinkages with economic and social considerations.

in the early stages of the strategic decision-making process in development planning.

The *Comisión Centroamericana de Ambiente y Desarrollo* (Central American Commission for Environment and Development – CCAD) actively promotes SEA. It is a well-known instrument in the context of the UNCCD, but is not yet being used systematically. Other organisations, such as the OECD and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), have also incorporated SEA as a basic instrument for the analysis of plans and programmes.



Strategic environmental assessment (SEA) provides an analytical approach

## 2. Achievements

As part of efforts to combat desertification, SEA is being implemented in Honduras in the revision of the municipal strategic development plans of 12 municipalities, which are grouped into two associations. Most of these municipalities are located in the area classified as high priority by the NAP to combat desertification. SEA aims to ensure that the sustainable use of land and the environment is taken into account in the planning and implementation phases of actions and projects carried out at the municipal level. The strategic actions and projects identified provide alternative solutions to municipal problems, with a view to ensuring that they have the least possible impact on natural resources and the environment and that appropriate mitigation measures are adopted, where necessary. The revised versions of the plans comply with the eligibility criteria for funds available under the Honduran Poverty Reduction Strategy.

SEA is being implemented in Honduras in cooperation with the following actors:

- Ministry of the Interior and Justice
- Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment
- 12 municipalities and two associations of municipalities
- IUCN

- German technical cooperation: Regional project to combat desertification (GTZ CCD ZAK) and Natural Resources Project (GTZ PRORENA)

The process to revise the municipal development plans, incorporating SEA, involves the following phases:

- municipal assessment to identify environmental, economic, social and institutional factors key to municipal development;
- formulation and evaluation of priority strategic development objectives, taking into account previously defined environmental problems and opportunities to strengthen environmental sustainability;
- identification and prioritisation of projects at the municipal level, integrating environmental criteria;
- evaluation of proposed actions, identification of opportunities to strengthen environmental sustainability and, where a certain degree of environmental damage cannot be avoided, the identification of mitigation measures;
- design of the monitoring and evaluation system, including environmental indicators.

### 3. Lessons learned

#### SEA facilitates the creation of tangible synergies among environmental conventions

For municipalities, there is little point in formulating separate action plans for biodiversity protection, climate change adaptation, desertification control and other issues covered by national and international environmental conventions. Thanks to the revision process, the objectives of the conventions were integrated into a municipal sustainable development strategy.

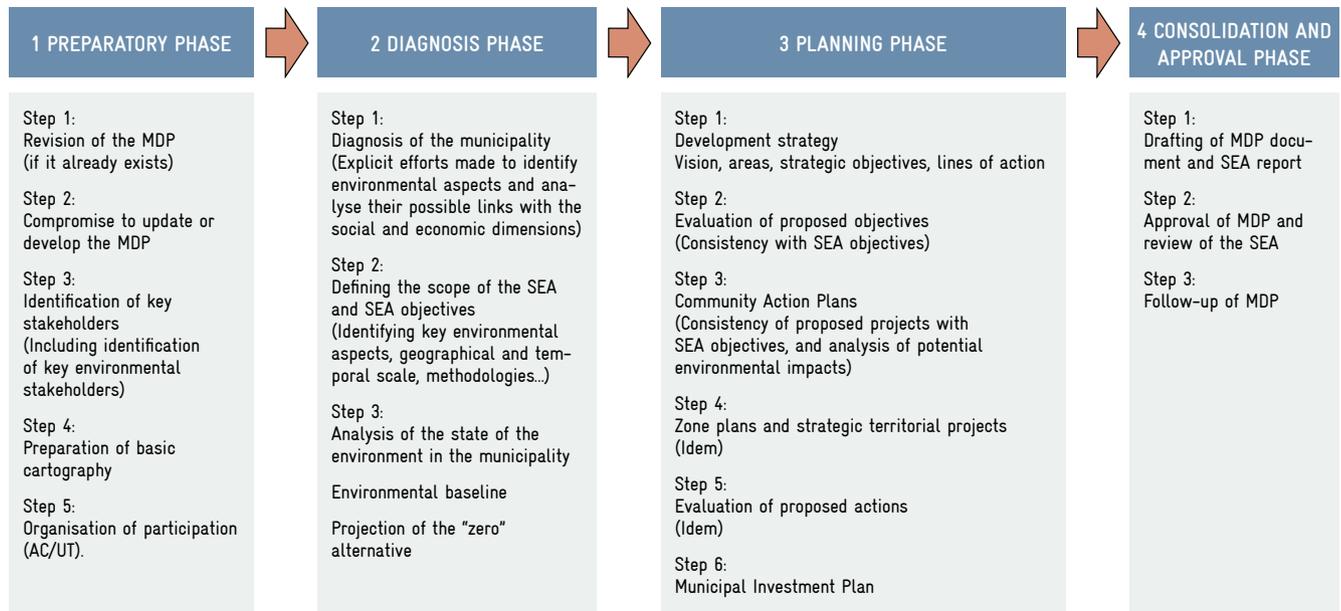
#### The firm commitment of the local authorities is essential to the success of the process

In Honduras, at least, this process was much more demanding than the usual municipal planning process, which is often left to the expertise of consultants and project management

experts. Requirements were very high as regards timeframe, financial and human resources and technical expertise. The process also required a high level of commitment and dedication on the part of the mayors and municipal technical staff. This factor, which was initially underestimated by the organisers of the process, must be taken into account when planning the sequence of steps to be followed, parallel training initiatives and the requisite support. It also makes it important to work with a realistically modest number of pilot municipalities.

#### The process requires training and external assistance

Planning skills are generally poor at the local level. This is not a problem for all matters relating to local knowledge development, the analysis of causes and effects and the establishment



Source: GIZ

of the area of action through participatory processes. However, in order to establish the mapping base, baseline information on natural resources and other land-management elements, external assistance is required from specialist organisations. In Honduras, this was the *Escuela Agrícola Pan-americana Zamorano* (Zamorano Pan-American School of Agriculture).

**Participatory processes reveal social injustices.** It is evident that a participatory process that analyses the use of natural resources reveals who has access to which resources. This can cause conflict situations, for example, when it is discovered that water available for irrigation is used by actors outside the municipality. In Honduras, this did not escalate into a full-scale conflict, but it is important to avoid problems of this kind by promoting dialogue among stakeholders.

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#### 4. Challenges

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The experience involving the implementation of SEA in participatory municipal planning processes was very positive. The Honduran authorities responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy, SERNA, the Ministry of the Interior and Justice and the mayors themselves recognised the value of incorporating SEA into municipal development processes and undertook to ensure the replication of the process using public resources. The success of the experience when taken to a wider scale will obviously depend on the progress of the process of decentralisation as a whole. SEA is an appropriate means of mainstreaming the objectives and orientations of the various environmental conventions into local development planning processes.

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#### 5. Further information on the subject

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A summary of our experience has been included in the publication *SEA in Practice – in Technical Cooperation*, which will be soon available on the website:  
[www.seataskteam.net](http://www.seataskteam.net)

Other information about SEA can also be accessed on the website.

## 9. Harnessing the most precious resource of the drylands: rainwater harvesting

### *1. What it involves*

Water is a basic necessity. In dry areas it is a scarce resource, and water scarcity is an important factor in the vicious cycle of poverty. Efforts to ensure an adequate supply of water are therefore the first step towards ensuring the right to survival and development.

Today, there are millions of people in the world who have to put considerable financial and physical effort into obtaining water, and this reduces their chances of lifting themselves



In areas affected by desertification, many people are a long way from a drinking water source. Choluteca, Honduras, 2007

out of poverty. Water scarcity erodes development opportunities. At the end of 2002, the United Kingdom's Centre for Ecology and Hydrology launched the water poverty index (WPI), which measures the relationship between the availability of water, environmental integrity, health, social marginalisation and poverty. The index was developed to evaluate water resource management in different countries according to an international standard and to promote improvements. The index score falls in the range of 0 to 100. Low values indicate water scarcity and an inadequate water supply. The index score for Haiti was 35 in 2002, while the score for the Dominican Republic was 59. A comparison of the two scores provides an insight into the scale of the challenges involved in watershed and groundwater management by the two nations. Taking into account population growth, which is currently 1.8% in the Dominican Republic, the index reveals that water availability per capita fell by 50% between 2004 and 2007. Recent forecasts of worsening drought as a result of climate change further emphasise the importance of the problem of water scarcity.

Rainwater harvesting is an alternative water supply solution that has been used through the ages in different parts of the world. It is re-emerging as a sustainable, concrete option for people whose daily lives are affected by water scarcity. The construction of the collection system is accompanied by training on water treatment and health in general and strengthens participatory processes.

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## 2. Achievements

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Brazil, 2003: The network *Articulação no Semi-Árido* (ASA), which promotes coordination among NGOs and other institutions in semi-arid areas in Brazil, launched a programme to construct rainwater tanks in areas affected by desertification. The programme, which also provides training courses, aimed to benefit over 5 million people. The programme involves much more than the construction of tanks. Through it, the local population plays an important role in water resource policy. The NGO network lobbies the government. As a result, the programme has achieved the active participation of organised civil society and the beneficiaries and has leveraged considerable public policy funding.

Honduras, 2006: The members of the National Coordinating Body examined the technical data sheet of a pilot project for the construction of conventional water tanks. The cost of the tank was so high that it would be impossible to make it

cost-effective. The GTZ Regional Project began discussions with Honduras and Brazil, and it was agreed that a project would be implemented to construct thirty tanks, based on the low-cost Brazilian model. The results were presented at the following international conference held by the UNCCD. The participating countries were so enthusiastic about the project that GTZ, in conjunction with the *Asociación Coordinadora Indígena y Campesina de Agroforestería Comunitaria Centro-americana* (indigenous peasant association for the coordination of community agroforestry in Central America – ACICAFOC), replicated the experience in six more countries. The project to build tanks in the context of implementing the UNCCD resulted in important rainwater harvesting initiatives in Guatemala, Haiti, Nicaragua, Panama, the Dominican Republic and El Salvador.

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## 3. Lessons learned

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### **Provide appropriate and site-specific technical solutions**

- The potential of a project implemented successfully in one country can be realised by replicating it in others, provided that it is adapted to the conditions there, taking into account differences in culture, social organisation, motivation, strategic partnerships, specific needs, and so on.
- When constructing the tanks, certain factors must be taken into account:
  - the type of roof on houses
  - the area of the roof in square metres
  - the average number of members per family
  - average rainfall in mm/year
  - availability of skilled labour (builders)
  - means of sealing the tank to avoid contamination by bacteria
- The Brazil-Honduras exchange benefited both countries. The tanks constructed combined the Brazilian model with

Honduran technology. The Honduran manual pump, the *Hondu-Flexi*, is low-cost (USD 5), easy to install and low-maintenance. Honduran development of this type of pump also proved to be an innovation for Brazil.

- Social technologies for rainwater harvesting have already been invented and tested by others. The challenge is to spread their use among populations affected by recurrent drought to meet specific needs (household, agricultural and livestock consumption).

### **Working together on practical solutions can strengthen institutional cooperation, political support and build trust**

- It is easier to bring institutions together around a specific project than around theoretical agreements. The construction of the rainwater tanks was successful in strengthening alliances among different sectors, because the result was visible, immediate and cheaper than prefabricated systems.

- This also attracts the interest of politicians who need to win the support of the population to ensure their re-election.
- In countries where government authorities have made a commitment to the process, the community organisations implementing the project are able to design additional activities and access additional resources in the short term. They also receive support from government institutions and cooperation agencies to extend the project.
- In the five countries participating in the programme, the government participated in one of two ways:
  - As facilitators, government agencies supported the process, but gave local organisations complete freedom to implement the planned activities. This created a climate of trust between the two actors. The effectiveness of local organisations in implementing the programme and using resources efficiently surpassed expectations. In every case, they built more tanks than planned and trained more builders and community leaders.
  - As implementers, government authorities participated directly in coordinating and implementing the process, with a close focus on the needs of the participating communities and organisations. This generated a climate of trust between the actors, and the state institutions involved showed a firm commitment to the project and its beneficiaries, along with a strong implementing capacity.

### **South-South cooperation with civil society is a powerful tool for technology transfer**

- The success of this cooperation was mainly due to the direct contact between civil society organisations with many years of practical experience. Clearly the grassroots specialists (constructors) from Brazil and later from Honduras who spent days in the communities sharing their real-life experience had an enormous impact on the recipient families. They came across as authentic experts on the situation of the beneficiary families.
- The focal-point structures and the regional organisations involved both had the important role to facilitate and initi-

ate the exchange, but the civil society organisations were essential for the sustainability of the process.

- This kind of South-South cooperation is an option that deserves greater attention in implementing the UNCCD and putting the NAPs into practice.

### **Go beyond technical solutions and invest in capacity development**

- It is important to focus on existing local capacities that can guarantee the replication of technology and the extension of the project. One important aspect of the exchange with Brazil was the training of local builders, who then acted as multipliers.
- The project for rainwater tanks was not confined solely to construction. Organising the construction of a water tank can be used as a tool to raise the population's awareness, promote self-organisation and increase knowledge about participatory processes. Water tanks can therefore be used as a vehicle to pave the way for other processes. The expe-



Beneficiaries are satisfied with the new water tank and are waiting for the coming rainfalls. Choluteca, Honduras, 2008

rience revealed a simple reality - if a project meets a basic need of the people, the following results are achieved:

- the process is accepted immediately;
  - local capacities are created and strengthened;
  - it frees up time and creativity to carry out other actions to address related problems;
  - it increases the trust of local actors and the motivation to extend the experience or undertake new initiatives;
  - it promotes a new model for interaction with natural resources.
- In order to ensure sustainability, it is important to choose the right approach from the outset. Key factors include the contribution of the population, the training of local multipliers, the involvement of local organisations for the replication of the project and tank maintenance (water boards in Honduras), the promotion of partnerships and political involvement. At this level, new ideas on how to increase the geographic coverage of the water tanks can also be devised. In the case of Nicaragua, it occurred to the beneficiary organisation to create a micro-loan scheme for the construction of household tanks, based on an agricultural credit programme already in place. The project aroused the interest of other financing sources in the country. In Guatemala, the Development Fund made a commitment to build 20 more tanks with government funding. External cooperation agencies in Guatemala are also interested in putting up funds for a social investment project, attracted by the immediate impact of the construction of tanks and the positive actions (externalities) generated as a result. These include environmental actions, such as the recovery of water sources through reforestation and a new model of social organisation responsible for ensuring the maintenance of the tanks and water quality.

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#### 4. Challenges

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This pilot initiative aroused the interest of families in the communities involved and of organisations in the region, who called for the construction of more water tanks. The biggest challenge is to mobilise funds to meet demand. Rapid assessments of the demand for water tanks in the countries participating in the project revealed a demand for approximately 1,200,000 tanks. Haiti registered the highest demand (over 500,000 units), and the Dominican Republic the lowest (27,000 units).

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#### 5. Further information on the subject

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**For further information on water availability in the Dominican Republic, see:**

- Robert Crowley: 'Análisis de políticas y programas con incidencia al uso sostenible de las tierras', in ¿ Un cambio verdadero, o todo como siempre ? La Estrategia Decenal de la UNCCD y su implementación, GTZ, CCD project, 2009, p. 17:  
[www.desertifikation.de/uploads/media/La\\_estrategia\\_decenal\\_de\\_la\\_UNCCD\\_2009.pdf](http://www.desertifikation.de/uploads/media/La_estrategia_decenal_de_la_UNCCD_2009.pdf)

**For further information on the project for water tanks in the context of the UNCCD, see:**

- [www.acicafoc.net](http://www.acicafoc.net)

**For further information on the methodology applied in Honduras, see:**

- Asociación Hondureña de Juntas Administradoras de Sistemas de Agua (AHJASA). Manual de Construcción de Cisternas de Placas, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, 2006:  
[www.desertifikation.de/uploads/media/Manual\\_construccion\\_de\\_cisternas\\_AHJASA.pdf](http://www.desertifikation.de/uploads/media/Manual_construccion_de_cisternas_AHJASA.pdf)

## 10. Combating deforestation and improving living conditions: improved stoves

### *1. What it involves*

Fuel derived from biomass is the main source of energy for 90% of households in developing countries. In spite of the considerable efforts undertaken to extend electrification, the number of households using biomass continues to rise. Deforestation and the overexploitation of forests owing to the collection of firewood are among the main causes of land degradation in arid areas.

Problems caused by the extensive use of biomass are not confined to environmental degradation. Traditional stoves and fireplaces have an adverse effect on people's health: the thick smoke they produce in the kitchen can cause breathing difficulties. The inefficient combustion of wood in a traditional stove creates a dangerous cocktail of chemical substances

to which women and children are exposed for several hours every day, causing respiratory and eye problems. Furthermore, the cost of buying firewood represents a considerable proportion of the household budget, and firewood gathering involves high opportunity costs.

Improved stoves can save up to 30% in firewood compared with open fires. They also work with different types of fuel. Apart from firewood, these stoves can also burn bush branches, crop waste and sawdust. The fuel burns more efficiently, reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions into the air. Chimneys eliminate soot and smoke from the kitchen and reduce eye irritations and respiratory problems. Improved stoves save time and money. They require less firewood, so not as much time is wasted collecting it, which frees people up to carry out productive activities.

The idea of improved stoves is not new, and a variety of household energy projects and programmes are being implemented around the world. German Development Cooperation has 25 years' experience in this area. Thanks to GTZ support, around one million stoves adapted to the specific customs and conditions of each country are being used around the world. Some of the projects failed, which is why the types of project carried out and their impact had to be analysed.

#### **Did you know that ...?**

- every year 1.5 million people die as a result of air pollution in kitchens – more than the number of people who die from malaria;
- in order to achieve a 50% reduction in the number of people without access to clean fuel by 2015, 485,000 people a day must become beneficiaries of clean fuel.

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## 2. Achievements

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In the Dominican Republic, a project was carried out in the 1990s to install stoves made of a mixture of clay and sand, known as 'Lorena stoves'. However, owing to the consistency of the material used and high rainfall in the country, the stoves deteriorated rapidly. In 2007, the *Fundación para el Desarrollo de Azua, San Juan y Elías Piña* (foundation for the development of Azua, San Juan and Elías Piña – FUNDASEP) and the *Consejo para el Desarrollo Campesino del Suroeste* (council for rural development in the south-east – CODECAS) launched a pilot project for improved stoves using more expensive but more resistant materials. In cooperation with volunteers from the United States Peace Corps and GTZ, 70 improved stoves were built with families living in areas affected by desertification.

In Honduras, 97 % of the rural population still use firewood for cooking. Traditional kitchens consume large amounts of firewood. With the support of GTZ, 120 stoves were built over a six-month period, in conjunction with a reforestation initiative. The beneficiaries participated in the construction of the stoves. They were also shown how to maintain the stoves and taught the principles of environmental protection and reforestation. They undertook to plant trees, and the NGO organising the initiative assumed the logistics costs of the nurseries.

Improved stoves significantly reduce firewood consumption, thereby contributing to the conservation of forests. They also have positive effects on the health of women and children.



Construction of improved stoves with the involvement of the beneficiaries. Border area, Dominican Republic, 2008



### Construction of improved stoves

The improved stove is simple and fast to build, provided that all the necessary materials are available. If the stove is used and maintained properly, it can last up to 20 years.

A variety of materials are required for the stove, including blocks, sand, cement, rods, nails, screws, flat zinc sheets and wire.

The family is responsible for bringing sand, cartloads of earth and stones and clay and for helping the builders to mix the cement. The stove must also be well covered with a palm or reed roof or, failing that, a zinc sheet.

It takes three days to build a stove and another week for it to dry. It is important to ensure that the stove does not get wet and to cook with the oven door closed and the ash pit door open.

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## *3. Lessons learned*

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### **Adapt techniques to local resources and facilitate changes**

- In order to lengthen the life of the stove, it is necessary to use good-quality materials, which are not always available locally. In such cases, transport costs make the stove more expensive. In view of the weak economic situation of the beneficiaries, this often means that the project has to be almost wholly financed with external funds. In order to lower costs, it is necessary to develop local capacities, so that the ceramic parts can be produced locally.

### **National Coordinating Body: support for scaling-up**

- The National Coordinating Body plays a key role in providing liaison at the national level. It contributes to the search for mechanisms to implement the project on a larger



Peace Corps volunteers supported the construction of improved stoves and played an important role in knowledge transfer. Border area, Dominican Republic, 2008

scale. Thanks to coordination efforts carried out by this body, applications proposing similar projects have been submitted to funds for natural resource protection. The establishment of sectoral alliances in the area of renewable energy policy or public health policy are other options that could be explored in a more systematic manner.

#### **Capacity building: invest in multipliers**

- In the Dominican Republic, US Peace Corps volunteers provided guidance. They taught local people about the design of the stoves and trained multipliers to create local capacities.
- Not all families were initially interested. It is important to identify a key person in the community and build a stove in his or her house that can serve as a demonstration of the stove's advantages for the more sceptical prospective users.

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#### *4. Challenges*

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These successful experiences call for quick responses from policy-making bodies in order to scale up and widely disseminate the technology. For example, the technology might be linked to afforestation or forest management programmes in order to combine the efficiency benefits of the stoves with sustainable ways to produce the biomass.

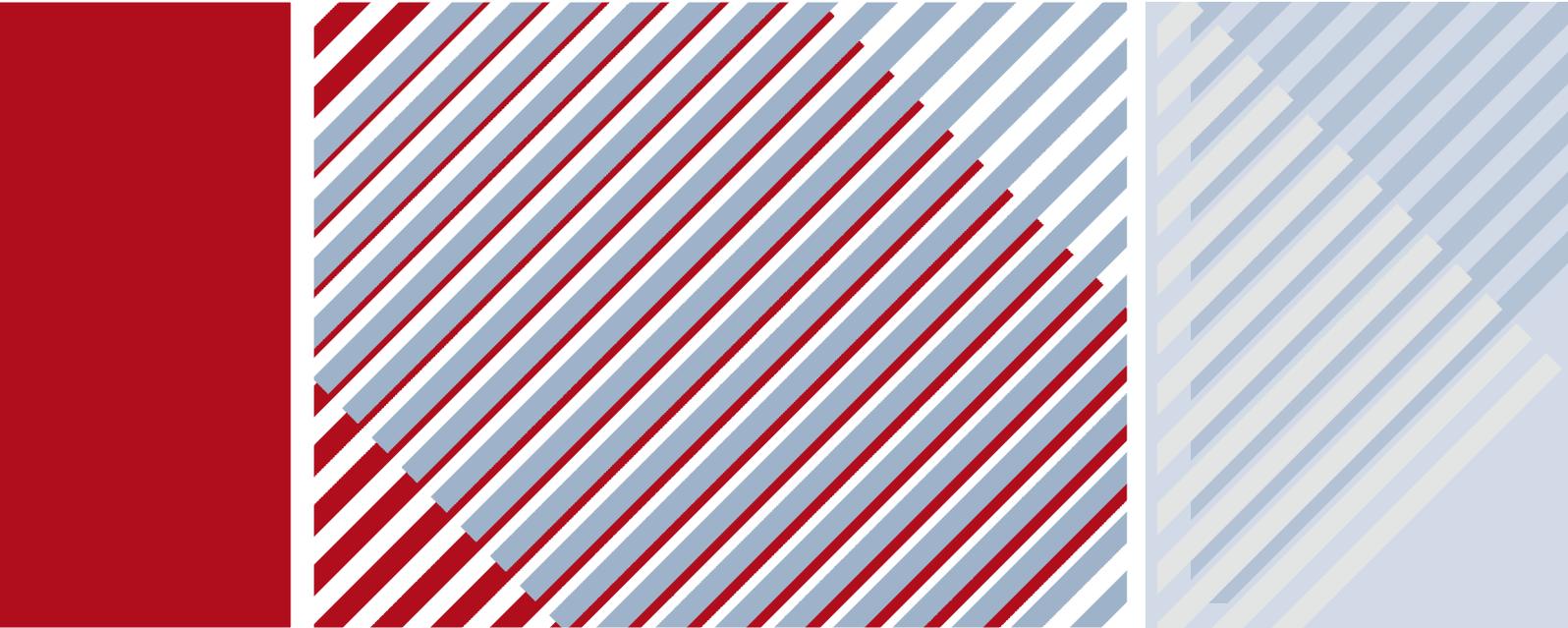
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#### *5. Further information on the subject*

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The first partner of this initiative was the Energising Development project, which helped to finance pilot schemes in southern Honduras. Energising Development is the implementation of a Dutch-German partnership to promote access to energy:  
[http://www.senternovem.nl/Energising\\_Development/index.asp](http://www.senternovem.nl/Energising_Development/index.asp)





Published by  
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Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

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